US president says 'seditious' Democrats should face death

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Thursday assailed Democratic lawmakers who told members of the US military they must refuse any illegal orders, calling them 'traitors who could face execution'.

Trump reposted an article about a video released on Tuesday by six Democratic lawmakers who served in the military or in the intelligence community.

"Seditious behaviour, punishable by death," the Republican president wrote in a *Truth Social* post.

"This is really bad, and dangerous to our country," Trump wrote in an earlier post. "Their words cannot be allowed to stand. Seditious behavior from traitors!!! Lock them up???"

Trump's posts are the latest example of him calling for punishment of those he sees as political enemies. Since returning to the presidency in January, Trump has occasionally called for imprisoning adversaries and his Justice Department has targeted critics such as former federal officials John Bolton and James Comey.

In Nov 2021, Trump defended the chants of his supporters who called for hanging Vice President Mike Pence as they stormed the US Capitol in a deadly riot on Jan 6 of that year.

Top Democrats in Congress said Trump's words could incite violence. House of Representatives leaders said they contacted Capitol police to ensure the Democratic lawmakers' safety.

At a news briefing later, White House spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt said "no" when asked whether the president wanted to execute members of Congress, but she castigated the Democrats for encouraging members of the military to defy the chain of command.

For civilians, US law has no provision for a charge of sedition, although "seditious conspiracy" carries a maximum penalty of 20 years. For troops, the uniform code includes a section on sedition, with possible penalties including death.

The lawmakers include Senators Elissa Slotkin, a former CIA analyst, and Mark Kelly, a former astronaut and Navy veteran, as well as Representatives Jason Crow, Maggie Goodlander, Chris Deluzio and Chrissy Houlahan.

'Refuse illegal orders'

In the video, they directly address members of the US military and intelligence community, saying the Trump administration was pitting those institutions against the American people and threatening tenets of the constitution.

"We know you are under enormous stress and pressure right now," they said.

"Our laws are clear: You can refuse illegal orders," said Kelly.

The other lawmakers offer a similar refrain before Slotkin concluded: "We need you to stand up for our laws, our constitution. Don't give up the ship."

After Trump published his post, Slotkin wrote on *X* that she and her colleagues would continue to defend the constitution. "No threat, intimidation, or call for violence will deter us from that sacred obligation," Slotkin wrote.

The lawmakers did not refer to any particular incident or scenario, and did not provide any examples of orders that they might consider illegal.

Some Democrats in Congress have been sharply critical of Trump's military strikes on suspected drug traffickers in the southern Caribbean and the Pacific, focusing on the legality and lack of transparency.—Reuters

FORMER US president Joe Biden, former first lady Jill Biden, ex-vice presidents Kamala Harris and Mike Pence attend the funeral service of former vice president Dick Cheney at Washington's National Cathedral.—AFP

Cheney honoured, but Trump off guest list

WASHINGTON: Dick Cheney, celebrated as a master Republican strategist but defined by the darkest chapters of America's "War on Terror," was honoured Thursday in a funeral attended by Washington's elite that pointedly left out President Donald Trump.

Cheney's career over half a decade reads like a catalogue of American statecraft, even as his long shadow over foreign policy — as defense secretary during the Gulf War and as the 46th vice president under George W. Bush — still divides the country.

Bush and fellow former president Joe Biden were among more than 1,000 guests at the Washington National Cathedral.

But Trump, who hasn't commented on Cheney's death, and his vice president JD Vance were not invited.

Every living former vice president — Kamala Harris, Mike Pence, Al Gore and Dan Quayle — were in attendance, along with generals, foreign dignitaries and Supreme Court justices.

"Vice President Dick Cheney was an American patriot who served this country like very few in our history, and I was always inspired by his by his quiet and steady leadership," Pence told cable news network MS NOW outside the cathedral.

Bush delivered a tribute, along with Cheney's daughter Liz — famously ousted from the congressional Republican Party over her opposition to Trump.

Praised for his intellect and described by historians as the "most powerful vice president in modern US history," Cheney was admired as a strategist of unusual clarity, and a steady hand who helped steer the nation through its darkest hours.

As vice president under Bush, he redefined a traditionally ceremonial role into one of unparalleled influence, helping drive national security policy and expanding presidential authority.—AFP

Tehran rules out IAEA access to bombed N-sites without deal

TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday that the UN's nuclear watchdog would not be given access to Iranian nuclear sites attacked during its recent war with Israel without a concrete deal being agreed.

The interview with the *Khabar Online* news agency was conducted before the International Atomic Energy Agency adopted a resolution on Thursday demanding access to the sites.

The resolution's purpose was primarily to renew and adjust the IAEA's mandate to report on aspects of Iran's nuclear programme, but it also stated Tehran must quickly provide the nuclear watchdog with answers and access it wants, five months after ai rstrikes by Israel and the US.

"The facilities that were attacked have their own story, and until a decision is made and a conclusion is reached between us, the IAEA and others, cooperation is not possible," he said in an interview posted to his *Telegram* channel, without elaborating on what such an agreement would entail.

In mid-June, Israel launched an unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran, triggering a 12-day war that the United States briefly joined with strikes on key Iranian nuclear facilities.

In the aftermath, Tehran suspended its cooperation with the IAEA and restricted the watchdog's inspectors from accessing the bombed sites, accusing it of bias and failing to condemn the strikes.

"The fact that they came and attacked and left... and now the agency comes to prepare a report for them on where (was attacked) and what happened and how much damage was done is not possible, it is clearly not wise," he added.

In September, Iran and the IAEA agreed on a new cooperation framework, but weeks later Tehran deemed it invalid after Britain, France and Germany triggered the return of UN sanctions that had been lifted under a now-defunct 2015 nuclear deal.

The war derailed high-level nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington that had begun in April, during which the two sides were at odds over Iran's right to enrich uranium, which Tehran defends as "undeniable".

Since the June war, Iran has repeatedly said it is open to restarting talks, but only if they take place on "equal footing".

During the interview, Araghchi said the US demands remain "detrimental to our national interests", ruling out any talks on its missile programme or other "defence capabilities".

"Negotiating about missiles, for example, to reduce them, to reduce their range, to reduce their number, there is no greater betrayal than this," he said.

He added talks with European governments were "no longer useful" after they triggered the snapback sanctions.

The IAEA cannot inspect the bombed facilities or verify Iran's uranium stock until Tehran submits a report updating it on what has happened to them. The bombed sites include Iran's three enrichment plants that were operating at the time.—Agencies

Iran president suggests capital relocation amid water crisis

TEHRAN: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Thursday that the country's capital should be relocated away from Tehran because of overcrowding and a deepening water crisis.

Pezeshkian has raised the idea of moving away from Tehran before, with rainfall in the capital this year at its lowest level for a century.

"The reality is that we have no choice. It (the relocation) is a necessity.

We cannot overwhelm this region with more population and construction," he said, according to the official *IRNA* news agency.

"We can develop, but we cannot solve its water problem." The Iranian president warned earlier this month that the current capital could be evacuated without rainfall before winter, though he did not elaborate.

Tehran nestles on the southern slopes of the Alborz mountains and has hot, dry summers usually relieved by autumn rains and winter snowfall.

The mountain peaks, usually already covered in snow at this time of year, are still dry.

Faced with water shortages, the government has decided to cut off water supplies periodically to Tehran's 10-million-strong population to limit consumption.

Pezeshkian's evacuation idea had drawn some criticism, including in local media. The reformist *Ham Mihan* newspaper branded his remarks as a "joke".—AFP

UK Covid probe faults 'lack of urgency' for 'thousands of deaths'

LONDON: About 23,000 deaths could have been prevented in England if the first Covid-19 lockdown had been introduced sooner at the start of the pandemic, a public inquiry stated on Thursday.

The second report from an inquiry into the UK response to the Covid-19 pandemic criticised the government in 2020, led by Boris Johnson, for a "lack of urgency" in the early days of the pandemic, adding the lockdown was "too little, too late".

Modelling shows that if the first lockdown had been imposed earlier, it could have prevented 23,000 deaths in England alone in the first wave, according to the 800-page report.

"Had the lockdown been imposed one week earlier than March 23, the evidence suggests that the number of deaths in England alone in the first wave up until July 1, 2020, would have been reduced by 48 per cent," inquiry chair Heather Hallett said.

"The tempo of the response should have been increased. It was not. Feb 2020 was a lost month," added Hallett, a retired senior judge. The inquiry chair also said that if restrictions had been introduced sooner, the mandatory lockdown could have been shorter, or "might not have been necessary at all".

'Unacceptable loss of life'

But the report, the second in a series from the independent inquiry, rejected claims that the government was wrong to implement the March 2020 lockdown.

"Without it, the growth in transmission would have led to an unacceptable loss of life," the report said.

The UK suffered one of the worst Covid-19 death tolls in Europe with more than 128,500 fatalities recorded by mid-July 2021.

More than 226,000 people have died from Covid in Britain since the start of the global pandemic in early 2020.

Johnson, who was prime minister from 2019 to 2022, has been criticised on various fronts for the pandemic response, including a lack of preparedness and failing to have enough protective equipment for frontline staff.

During inquiry hearings last month, Johnson said he regretted the impact of the decisions his government took on children, especially the "nightmare" school closures.

The report also criticised a "lack of trust" between Johnson and leaders of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which have devolved public healthcare systems.

The first inquiry report, published in July last year, found that UK ministers and officials had been woefully underprepared for a global pandemic.

In a statement, a group representing families who lost loved ones during the pandemic slammed the government's "catastrophic mishandling".

"We now know that many of our family members would still be alive today if it weren't for the leadership of Boris Johnson and his colleagues," Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK said. The report recommended changes, including reforming decision-making structures, during emergencies and improving consideration of the impact of decisions on vulnerable groups.

Public inquiries in Britain are government-funded, but have an independent chair.

They investigate matters of concern, establishing facts about what happened, why and what lessons can be learnt.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

NEW DELHI: A municipal worker steers his boat through the waters of Yamuna river laden with polluted foam, on a smoggy morning in the Indian capital. New Delhi is regularly ranked among the world's most polluted capitals.—AFP

BELEM (Brazil): Oxfam activists, wearing big head masks depicting world leaders, stage a mock emergency room scene symbolising a dying Planet Earth to stress the need for urgent climate action during the UN Climate Change Conference.—Reuters

MAGDEBURG (Germany): A candle and flowers are placed near the Christmas market, where a suspect drove a car through the crowd on Dec 20 last year. Six people were killed in the incident.—Reuters

A WAX effigy of the late princess Diana, wearing the 'revenge dress', during its unveiling at the Musee Grevin in Paris.—AFP

Diana enters Paris waxwork museum in 'revenge dress'

PARIS: The Grevin waxwork museum in Paris unveiled a new star attraction on Thursday: Princess Diana in the "revenge dress" she wore after public revelations about her then-husband prince Charles's infidelity.

The Grevin Museum in central Paris, similar to Madame Tussauds in London, already has models of Charles, who is now King Charles III, and his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II.

But Diana was a notable absentee, despite her tragic association with the city where she died in a car crash in August 1997.

She is shown wearing a copy of the black gown by designer Christina Stambolian that she wore for a public appearance in 1994 amid a media frenzy about the breakdown of her marriage to Charles.

She stepped out in the dazzling off-the-shoulder dress on the same day as an interview was broadcast in which Charles admitted to being unfaithful.

"More than 28 years after her tragic death in Paris, Diana is still a major figure in global pop culture, celebrated for her style, humanity and independence," the Grevin Museum said in a statement.

The date chosen for the unveiling — November 20 — was also a "sly reference" to a bombshell interview she gave to the BBC on the same date exactly thirty years ago in which she said "there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a little bit crowded".

That was a reference to Camilla Parker-Bowles, whom Charles has since married.—AFP

TEHRAN: An Iranian woman pulls a stall displaying books she donated during a 'Hand to Hand' outdoor exchange event.—AFP

MEXICO CITY: Participants in historical costumes attend celebrations to mark the 115th anniversary of the 1910 Mexican revolution.—Reuters